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From: Brian Bendig
Sent: Friday, November 10, 2006 9:58 AM
To: Board of Selectmen
Cc: Historic District Commission; Historical Commission; Don Johnson; glenn.berger@verizon.net
Subject: Historic District Commission Report to Selectmen on Exchange Hall, et al.

Members of the Board of Selectmen ("BOS"):

On November 6, 2006, Selectman Ashton attended the continued public hearing conducted by the Historic District Commission ("HDC") on Glenn Berger's application for Certificate of Appropriateness No. 626. That application concerns changes proposed for 2 School Street, 127 Main Street, and 131 Main Street. On the 6th, Selectman Ashton requested comments from us for BOS consideration in connection with the hearing set for November 13, 2006 at 7:15 p.m. on Mr. Berger's application for a Site Plan Special Permit ("SPSP") for work at these properties. We comment as follows:

(1) The HDC is concerned about the proposed use of an engineered retaining wall blocking material known as "Redi-Rock", especially given the substantial quantity of large blocks proposed (some blocks will weigh over half a ton). However, the Redi-Rock walls would be located toward the rear of the site. Based on review of overhead and sectional drawings, the HDC believes these retaining walls would be largely obscured from the operative public way (Main Street) by distance over grade, vegetation and the building at 131 Main. Mr. Berger also intends to have plantings in place on and close to the walls to soften and obscure the walls' appearance even well within the site. The HDC is inclined to favor the use of this material as generally proposed by Mr. Berger, given the low projected visibility from Main Street due to placement and screening.

(2) Substantial quantities of existing fieldstone and granite block walls at the rear of the site will be displaced, and it is Mr. Berger's intention to re-use these traditional materials at other places on site (generally in locations highly visible from Main Street). The exact configurations of the relocated walls are as yet undetermined, however. The HDC is concerned to avoid historically inappropriate use of this material.

(3) The HDC is also concerned about the proposed loss of the historic cider mill building at 127 Main, which now sits toward the rear of the site that is the subject of proposed work. Removal of the cider mill, which was converted to a residence long ago and is in an altered, semi-derelict state, is described as essential for creating the parking necessary to render Exchange Hall a viable retail structure. Viability of retail use of Exchange Hall, furthermore, is described as essential for proceeding with its restoration. Although the loss of the former cider mill will be regrettable, the HDC is inclined to allow the removal of the 127 Main building from the site, in that the rehabilitation of Exchange Hall is extremely important to the South Acton Historic District and the Town of Acton. It would be unfortunate if a major, highly-visible, treasured building such as Exchange Hall remained in an advancing derelict state because the relatively insignificant, low-visibility 127 Main were considered invulnerable. The HDC of course prefers that 127 Main be relocated rather than simply torn down, and has given Mr. Berger information from which he might contact persons who might be interested in acquiring and moving the building. We will continue to encourage and try to facilitate this option.

(4) The HDC has concerns about use of nontraditional material (small-sized blocks of Redi-Rock) for proposed stairs in front of Exchange Hall.

(5) We have conducted an extensive process of review and public hearings on this matter. We support this project and the documented proposed repairs/changes to Exchange Hall and the building at 131 Main.

The HDC will have at least one member in attendance at the SPSP hearing on Monday to address any questions. The HDC hopes to be able to vote on application 626 at its next meeting, on November 20, 2006, when Mr. Berger provides us with a sample of roofing material and after the HDC has had an opportunity to review all staff comments on the site plan (received by us on November 3rd). The HDC's public hearing on 626 has been continued to 8 p.m. on November 20th. Mr. Berger has consented in writing to an extension of time

for the HDC's decision on his application until December 19, 2006.

Brian Bendig
Chair, HDC